

February 4, 2024 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

## **A Time to Be Silent and a Time to Speak: Elephants, Pirates and Living by the Spirit**

(1 Corinthians 9.16-23, Mark 1.29-39)

Our God is constant, and faithful, and steadfast, but the Christian faith is full of contradictions because we can be tempted to attach to some aspect and argue that that is all there is.

We are like the tale of the six blind men and the elephant who each examine one part of an elephant and each come to very different conclusions about what an elephant is like (spear, fan, wall, tree, snake, rope). They are all partly right, but also all quite wrong, simply because that is not all there is. However, we all start by learning a little before we learn more. Poet Maya Angelou said, *Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.*

As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:12, *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

God knows us fully, deeply and completely. Jesus said, *If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.* (John 14.7) We can know the Father through the Son. We can grow in relationship to the Father and the Son through the Spirit. Can we broaden our vision along with our hearts?

Today's readings have some seeming opposites or un-alikes to perplex us or to encourage us.

Do you know this song? It is from the sixties but based on scripture. We will only listen to the first line. Call it out when you know either the song or the scripture source of the song.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4ga\\_M5Zdn4&ab\\_channel=embryonicsoul](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4ga_M5Zdn4&ab_channel=embryonicsoul)

[*Turn! Turn! Turn!* (also known as or subtitled *To Everything There Is a Season*) is a song written by Pete Seeger in 1959. The song was originally released in 1962 but became an international hit in late 1965 when it was adapted by the American folk-rock group the Byrds.]

The words of Ecclesiastes 3.1-8 are very well known. *There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.* And then there is a list of many things and their parallels or opposites.

Today we are looking at the reading from Mark's Gospel and Paul's letter to the Christians in Corinth through the lens of Ecclesiastes 3.7b, *a time to be silent and a time to speak.*

The silence may be total, or it may be a silencing of our usual perspective to enable another to hear better.

Jesus taught by proclaiming his messages in synagogues and gatherings of ordinary people. He healed the afflicted, both physically and by casting out demons. The demons said that Jesus was the Son of God and that he had come to destroy them. Is casting out the same as destroying? Isn't this the truth about Jesus' intentions? Isn't being the Son of God a good thing? Isn't healing and the casting out of demons a good thing? Perhaps so, but Jesus commanded the demons to be silent and not speak of it.

Imagine that your working day includes time working with someone who is known to lie and deceive and seek to harm people. Would you want that person praising you to others in the workplace? The result might be the suspicion of your colleagues rather than their admiration. It would not make for a healthy workplace.

The demons did not speak for Jesus, and he commanded them not to speak of him. After telling the demons to be silent, Jesus withdrew to a quiet place to pray. Then, avoiding the lure of cheap popularity, he took his disciples to other towns, where he continued to proclaim the message in their synagogues and to cast out demons.

Paul also used seeming-opposites in his teaching. He spent a lot of time sharing the good news with people, some of whom had no Jewish background, and no real knowledge of the scriptures. Paul introduced them to Jesus directly and he took considerable trouble to make the message accessible to them by speaking to them in ways that they could relate to, whether they were Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free.

We all relate to different things in different ways and a range of images or modes of expression can express a common idea. (cf. Liberation theology, Feminist theology, Creation theology) Paul shared the good news by speaking of freedom and slavery, of being under the law or outside the law, of using weakness to bring salvation, and all for the sake of the Gospel. Each way of speaking spoke the truth of the Gospel with the potential to reach people with different life experiences.

Did you know that you can buy the whole Bible, in paperback, Old Testament and New Testament (or Tha' Old Scrolls & Tha' New Scrolls), written in pirate-speak, for about \$US 30?

To hear the same message in different ways that might reach different people, listen to the words of the King James Bible and its re-imagined version, the Pirate Bible.

Here is a sample:

Matthew 6:3 (KJV) *But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.*

Matthew 6:3 (Pirate Bible) *But when yer scuttle booty, let not yer port hand know what yer starboard hand be doin'!*

Why on earth would you want such a strange Bible? I hear you ask.

Well, in truth, nobody needs it, unless they really are a pirate, and an old-time one at that. Any pirates here? It is certainly frivolous, but it was written for a serious purpose. It is by Max Stevens with, I believe, some AI assistance. It may not have been used for evangelising pirates who spoke in this way, unless we can enlist time-travel, but it did serve to test the needs of Bible translation.

The translation of the Pirate Bible had 2 main parameters. It had to be consistent in the language used and it had to preserve the meaning of the original scripture. That sounds like good advice for any translator.

In this case, the process did not start with the original Greek and Hebrew but with the King James Version. You can judge how well you think it succeeded.

Genesis 1:2 (Pirate Bible) *The land was a mess, nary a speck of shape, 'n all was shrouded in dark over the deep abyss. But then the spirit of ol' God sailed across the waters.*

In today's reading from 1 Corinthians, Paul speaks of those under the law and those outside the law. In Galatians, He wrote a lot more about Gentiles and the law, so here is a Pirate Bible verse from Galatians 5:18 (Pirate Bible) *But if ye be led by tha Spirit, ye be not under the law.* Or in a slightly different edition that sounds a bit more Pirates of the Caribbean, *But if ye be led by the wind, ye ain't subject to the Code.*

Culture and language vary, and they continue to change and evolve over time. Paul encouraged sharing the Gospel by speaking in ways that could be understood whether those differences of understanding were linguistic or cultural. Can we do the same when we share the Good News?

For example, if you are talking to someone who is not a pirate but loves sailing, you might compare choosing to live in the spirit or in our own power to a potential collision between a sailing ship and a power boat. What is the give way rule for power boats and sailing ships? *A powered vessel must give way to a sailing vessel, unless it's being overtaken by the sailing vessel.* (<https://www.nsw.gov.au/driving-boating-and-transport/waterways-safety-and-rules/rules/giving-way>) Different images and ways of speaking (or not speaking) will reach different people.

Let's finish by revisiting Mark 1.35 from our regular Bible. *In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*

We also need to find our "deserted place" to re-energize and charge our spiritual batteries. That place may be different for each one of us, but it is a vital part of our ministry and a good antidote for thinking that all this work is ours rather than God's. May we power on, but always give way to the guidance of the Spirit. Amen.